



Feedback Report

The Learning Styles Indicator

Version I

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introduction

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty".

Henry Ford

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

Alvin Tofler

We all have preferences for what we learn and how we learn it. For example, some of us prefer to learn in a hands-on and practical way while others enjoy working with abstract theories and complex ideas. Some people prefer to learn by experimenting and others like to use their imagination to guide what they learn.

What this means is that each one of us will naturally have his or her own preferred way of going about any particular learning task. What it also means though is that for each one of us, some types of learning will be more difficult than others. If we are practically inclined, then learning through theory and abstract ideas will be more difficult. If our preference is to learn by accumulating factual information, then when we are asked to use our imagination and insight to think of new ideas, this could be more challenging and difficult.

To put this differently, we each have our own preferred 'learning style' and the purpose of the Learning Styles Indicator is to help you discover which learning style you personally prefer. This can help you in finding ways of learning which suit your style and which will help you to learn most effectively.

However, a further purpose of the Learning Styles Indicator is to help you become aware of alternative styles which are different from your own preferred style. Sometimes in life, we have no choice. Our education or our job may require that we take a different approach.

So to know what we are naturally good at can also help us to know what we are less good at and can show us how we may need to develop our learning skills in order to cope with a variety of different learning tasks and learning content.

When reading your results, do bear in mind that:

These are only suggestions and only define what you seem most comfortable with - not necessarily what you are good at.

Everyone can adapt his/her style to fit different circumstances - although some people find it easier to adapt than others.

Sometimes your answers do not give a clear-cut pattern and so the ideas and suggestions below may not always fit closely - so feel free to identify those that fit and to question those that don't.

If you find yourself questioning the accuracy of the report, before rejecting the suggestions, it can be useful to imagine that they are true for some part of your life. Ask yourself in what situations they might be true or whether they may have been true when you were younger.

The four basic learning styles

The Learning Styles Indicator assumes that there are four basic learning styles: Clarifier, Innovator, Activator and Explorer and these are described briefly below.

Clarifier

- learning in a structured and systematic way
- paying attention to details and facts
- absorbing as much information as possible
- learning via an orderly process with milestones
- posing questions to clarify what has to be learnt and making sure that everything has been considered

Innovator

- using insight and innovation to solve complex problems
- generating new ideas and alternatives
- exploring and developing theories to help understanding
- dealing with abstract concepts rather than practical realities
- taking time to reflect and time to read, research and think
- identifying core issues and inter-relationships

Activator

- emphasising the practical applications of what is learnt
- taking a common-sense and matter-of-fact approach
- focussing on action and a realistic appraisal of the situation
- organising facts, situations and people in order to deliver results
- avoidance of “woolly” thinking and procrastination
- attending to immediate and practical issues and details

Explorer

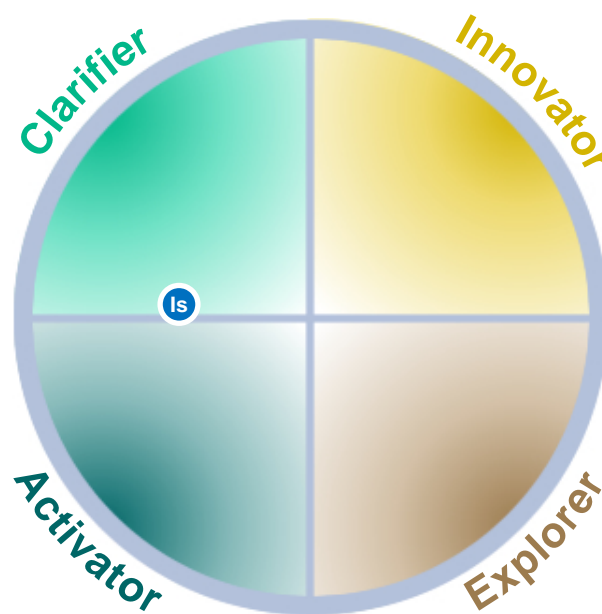
- focussing on the “big picture” rather than the details
- valuing alternatives and being flexible
- valuing inspiration as a source of ideas
- being creative and trying out new things
- seeing variety and change
- learning via active discovery
- continuing to ask questions and refusing to accept simple answers

Remember that no one learning style is 'better' than the others. Nevertheless, a given style may be better suited to a particular learning task than other styles. Also, although you may have a preference for one of the four learning styles, this does not mean to say you are unable to make use of the others.

a summary of your results



Your answers to the questionnaire help to identify which of the four basic learning styles you prefer most. In the diagram below, the blue circle shows your preference.



The closer the blue circle is to the darker coloured regions of the diagram, the clearer your preference is for the learning style in question. As the colours get lighter towards the borders with the other styles, it means that your preference is less clear. Also, if the blue circle is close to the border with another style it may mean that you enjoy (or use) the other style as well – or that you are currently undecided.

The diagram shows that you have a preference for the 'Clarifier' style and, as a consequence, your least preferred style is likely to be the one opposite which is the 'Explorer' style.

The following pages provide a more detailed description of your preferred learning style.



What Clarifiers might choose to study

People choose to learn things for many different reasons. Sometimes this is because they have had particular experiences; sometimes they are influenced by friends, parents or have particular career interests. However, your learning style can help you to recognise how certain topics could be more naturally and immediately interesting for you. People with the Clarifier learning style preference often prefer subjects which:

- contain facts and details
- can be organised and structured
- are not too open-ended
- are not too theoretical
- can be linked to past experience

The learning environment Clarifiers usually prefer

When Clarifiers use their preferred learning style they usually seek an environment which is quiet and has a clear framework and rules. They like the chance to absorb information at their own pace and get frustrated by too much theory without more concrete examples and supporting information. You may like to consider previous learning situations that you found motivating and stimulating. Clarifiers usually describe situations which involve:

- plenty of interesting information, facts and details
- tangible ideas which they can relate to their own experience
- learning through reading, absorbing and reflection
- a quiet environment with few distractions

- getting things clear and structured
- having a clear idea of “how to” do something

You are therefore unlikely to find learning rewarding when you are expected to react quickly with insufficient preparation. You like getting immersed in the subject so that you feel you have a good grasp of all the relevant details. You can get frustrated if the people around you are too noisy, wanting to chat and learn by discussion. Your preferred style would normally be more individual and reflective.

You may sometimes benefit from being a little more interactive, talking, listening and discussing things with others before you have formulated your ideas. You may find that this increases the speed with which you gather information and it may also help you to see the bigger picture.

Your ideal teacher: this will be someone who is knowledgeable, thoughtful and detailed. They have a vast store of additional relevant details which they happily share when questioned and they do not try to get you to move on too quickly. They encourage you to contribute, recognising that you are not necessarily the first to put your ideas forward and they allow time for reflection and consolidation.

What motivates Clarifiers to learn something new

Everyone needs a purpose and some kind of outcome or benefit from their learning. However, people with different learning styles are likely to have very different reasons and rewards. Clarifiers are likely to want to feel that they have:

- a good grasp of all the relevant details
- questioned and probed so that the subject is not too abstract
- related the subject to their own previous learning and experience
- produced a detailed and structured outline or plan
- acquired techniques and skills
- consolidated their learning

A Clarifier's most natural talents

A Clarifier's style can make them particularly good at:

- working with detail
- exposing flaws and gaps
- converting ideas into structured plans
- grasping basic issues and ensuring that nothing is left out
- researching the background and producing more relevant information
- imposing order and structure
- giving clear and detailed instructions

A Clarifier's least natural talents

Clarifiers have to work harder to:

- see the value in an abstract idea
- be innovative and consider alternatives
- accept that sometimes subjects are ambiguous
- proceed on the basis of incomplete information
- accept group working involving much discussion and interaction
- let go, get on with it and learn on the job

Clarifiers get criticised for:

- being pedantic and nit-picking
- criticising before they have the whole picture
- using plans as rules rather than as guides
- proceeding with insufficient flexibility
- not seeing the wood for the trees
- responding too slowly in a crisis



It has been proposed that all effective learning will go through a cycle of four stages: ACT --> REFLECT --> IMAGINE --> EXPERIMENT. Understanding your learning style in terms of the learning cycle can be very useful and make you a more effective learner.

Each of these four stages is important in the learning process and each is associated with a particular learning style. Therefore, if you know what your preferred learning style is, then you will also know at which stage in the learning cycle you will naturally be at your best. More importantly, you will also know at which stage in the learning process you would expect to do least well. This can help you to understand where in the learning process you may need to make most effort and where you most need to develop your learning skills

The four stages and the learning styles with which they are most associated are as follows.

Stage 1 – ACT

This is the active experience, a period where there is opportunity to learn by involvement, practical activity and 'getting on with it'. Activators are normally at their best in this stage

Stage 2 – REFLECT

This is a period of contemplation and reflection. By reviewing what has (or hasn't) happened and what might need to happen, the current activity can be linked to previous situations, so providing an opportunity to understand and personalise the experience. Clarifiers are normally at their best in this stage.

Stage 3 – IMAGINE

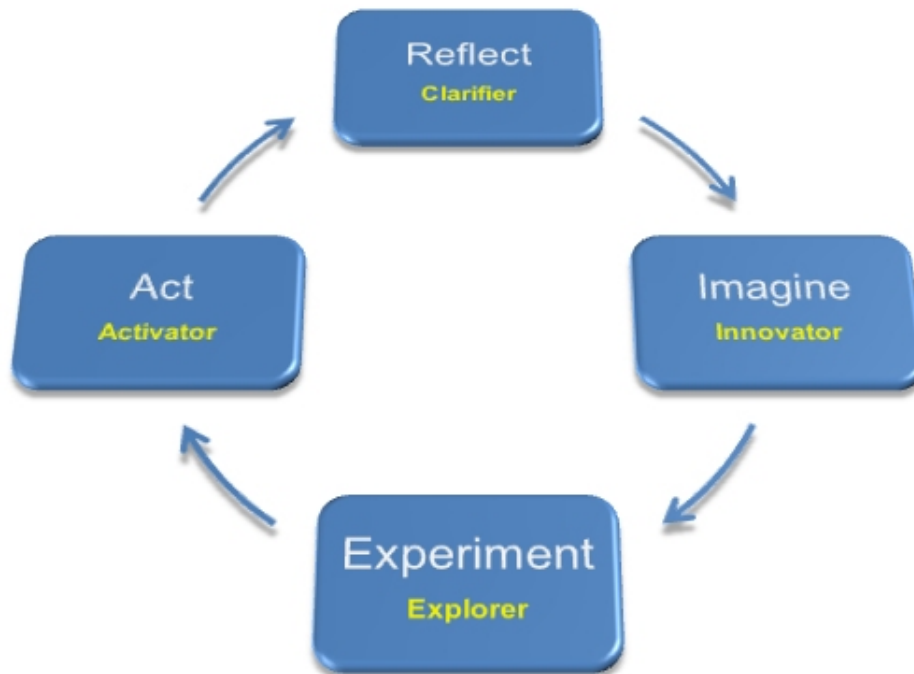
This is a period where new and varied ideas and options can be explored. New ideas are generated, different theories proposed and any potential implications considered. Innovators are normally at their best in this stage.

Stage 4 – EXPERIMENT:

This is a period where the new ideas are explored more actively, perhaps with some trial and error. It is the stage where prototypes, plans and schemes emerge with options and designs for implementation. Explorers are normally at their best in this

stage.

In the following diagram, we can see how the four stages of the learning cycle are linked to the four learning styles.



When engaged in learning, we often like to spend time in the stage which best suits our own learning style and sometimes this causes us to spend insufficient time at the other stages. Effective learning requires that we devote time and attention to each stage and making sure that you do this will considerably enhance your own learning.

Whatever learning style you currently prefer, remember no one style can be thought of as being better or worse than another. You should consider whether the results presented in the report truly reflect your style and preferences. This may help you clarify how you learn best, how you choose what to learn, why you make the choices you do, what environments suit you best and what you could do to improve and enjoy learning more. You may also like to consider how much the questionnaire reflects your natural or dominant style and under what circumstances you use the other three styles.



If you are interested in developing your learning style in order to improve your learning, you may like to consider trying the following exercises:

EXERCISE 1

Consider an activity or piece of work you need to produce within the next few days or weeks and write down a summary of how you would normally approach it.

One of the strengths that Clarifiers often bring is in finding out as much relevant information as possible before beginning a task. They then follow this by careful planning and precise execution of the task itself. However, there are times when a less detailed approach can also be beneficial. Because this may at first feel rather 'loose' to you, it can be worth trying it out in a situation in which the outcome is not critical. Think of such a situation and then try the following:

- Being 'prepared to be unprepared' and perhaps doing less research than you usually do
- Brainstorming the subject with someone you respect so that you can consider a variety of options and alternatives
- Working more quickly than you usually do and assuming that what you are doing is just a 'first draft'
- Trying out some novel ideas to make the work different - for example, doing something that may be a little unusual or that you would normally dismiss out-of-hand

EXERCISE 2

When in situations where people are thinking through ideas and making plans, Clarifiers often help to point out problems, making sure that people have clearly evaluated what is needed and follow an agreed plan, rather than going 'off piste' or trying anything new or untested.

So think about a situation where you have used this approach and it has met with resistance from others. Try to put yourself in the other people's shoes. Write down

what you imagine would be their best arguments for criticising your approach and the key advantages they would claim for doing things their way. Now consider the following questions:

- Are there any elements in their arguments that might have some justification?
- What may have been missing from your approach?
- How might you change your approach in a future similar situation?

EXERCISE 3

Think about what you might do to re-organise either the work of your department or a system or set of procedures related to your work. Then, trying to work much more quickly than you usually do, think of five things that could usefully be changed for the better. Then:

- Write down either one word or draw a picture to represent each of the five ideas you have had.
- Capture each idea in one short sentence of less than 20 words.
- List all the positive things about each idea (and ignore any negative things that might occur to you).
- Choose one idea and (a) identify the first step you need to take to make it happen and (b) write down what you will do and by when.

EXERCISE 4

For this exercise, you will need to work with one or two colleagues who have a different learning style from yourself (and who are also interested in developing their approaches). Decide between yourselves on an imaginary project which you have to undertake which will involve each of you learning and implementing something which is new to you. Working independently, each should produce an overview of the steps which will be involved in the project for the team as a whole, a detailed plan for whatever the project has to achieve plus a summary of how you will make your contribution effectively. When you have each done this:

- make a copy for each of the people involved and pass it to them
- examine the others' approaches individually and make notes on how each one differs from your own
- identify things you particularly like and highlight anything that was missing from your own
- discuss the differences between each of your separate approaches

- identify anything you have learnt (either from the learning style report or this exercise) that may help you to vary your style more appropriately